

A

Sermon

PREACHED TO THE CAMBRIDGEPORT PARISH,

MAY 28, 1871,

*On the First Sunday after the Ratification
of the Treaty with England, by the
Senate of the United States.*

BY GEORGE W. BRIGGS.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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THE following Discourse,—the expression of an hour of joy, rather than an elaborate Sermon,—is commended to the forbearing judgment of those who desired it to be printed.

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S E R M O N .

Isaiah II. 4.—NEITHER SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANY MORE.

A grand event has occurred during the last week, whose importance at the present moment it is difficult to over-estimate, whose promise for the best interests of civilization itself in the future it is impossible to grasp. The Senate of the United States, which disgraced itself by angry discussions concerning its prerogatives, redeemed its character by the adoption of the Treaty between England and America. We can almost forgive the unworthy debates, the waste of days, in the attempt to vindicate fancied privileges, after this act of statesmanship. Let us forget that it took senators a longer time to accuse one another for revealing what the nation had a right to know at the beginning, than to debate the treaty itself; and let us only remember that their fitting duty has been so nobly done. When will men and legislators learn that their dignity is never

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secured by attempts to defend or vindicate it? Let them link their names with truth, justice, liberty, civilization, the cause of humanity and right, and they place themselves upon enduring principles, the pillars of the universe, and stand upon pedestals of honor.

I have nothing to do with the minor details of this great settlement of international disputes to-day. Of necessity it is in a certain sense a compromise. Something of the most extreme demands was yielded on either side. In some respects, claims in themselves reasonable and just, have been partially abated. Ingenious men discover various little points of criticism. But I forget all these fancied or real objections, and see one grand whole, one grand event in the interests of peace. Questions of peculiar importance and difficulty, involving interests, grievances, national honor, questions a hundred-fold greater than those which have plunged nations into bloodiest wars, have been calmly and honorably adjusted. Last summer, France and Prussia rushed to arms upon a mere pretext, which concerned neither the dignity nor rights of either empire. Now, controversies that involved great principles of international law, concerning acts of outrage that

wounded the nation to its very heart, are settled without a drop of human blood, without even a threat of war. More than that. A broader basis of mutual understanding and harmony is established, which at once atones for the past and secures the future. Let there be no petty criticisms upon a measure in itself so grand. The clamor of little unsatisfied interests should be silenced in the sublime accord of this great victory of peace.

How silently the most beneficent and grandest things are accomplished! For almost a year the world has resounded with the clash of arms. The tumult of the battle has filled Christendom with its din, and morning and evening, millions have intently listened to the tidings from the field of strife. The eyes of Europe and America, I had almost said of the race itself, have been fastened upon one spot, as if there alone were events worthy of attention. The great things were not there. God does not disclose his greatest majesty in the storm, the earthquake, that blanch men's cheeks with fear. The silent forces of Nature, that cover the earth anew with living green, robing hill and vale and prairie with beauty, that hold the stars in their orbits, that bring the

evening and the morning, the seed-time and the harvest, with their ever-varying splendors,—these are more beneficent and grand. This awful outbreak of war has accomplished little. Sedan and its accompanying battles discrowned one emperor and made another; but they established no new principle of international law, gave no new security to civilization and peace. A few Commissioners, quietly discussing mutual differences at Washington, have done an immeasurably mightier work than generals, marshals, emperors, hurling millions of men at one another in the fury of the battle. The noiseless movement of the pen has performed a greater deed than the roar of artillery. This European war has compacted dis-united Germany indeed into an empire,—a result which will be a blessing if she wisely develops the resources of her power and the mind of her people; or which may be a curse if she too becomes besotted with dreams of success and conquest. But whatever Germany may be in the future, she has sown in the heart of France the seeds of undying hate, that may bear the deadly fruit of other wars. The peaceful Commission has given a new security against war itself, sown the seeds of good-will between continents and

nations, and recognized a principle of international justice which civilized men will rejoice to honor. What is it that Von Moltke, the Prussian commander, has planned and executed a campaign that seems unparalleled in the annals of war, and written his name on the scroll of martial renown with that of the first Napoleon? The negotiator who maintains national honor and establishes peace, writes his name higher still, and on a far nobler scroll. The warrior has a kind of greatness. The figure of the great Napoleon is fitly sculptured upon the front of the Arch of Triumph in Paris, surrounded with dread and fitting emblems, to perpetuate his fame as a splendid type of that form of genius. But "blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called," they are, "the children of God." Let the bugle sound its triumphant notes for the victors in battle. But when the peacemakers do their work the angels sing the heavenly song, "On earth peace, good-will among men."

What a contrast between the appalling scenes in Europe, and the peaceful negotiations here during the last few weeks. The Germans had completed their conquest. But their withdrawal from the strife was only to give place to a deadlier, more

inhuman contest. There, battle has raged around the city, and along the streets of Paris, blazing fiercely as the fires of hell. Here, trusted statesmen sought to weigh great questions in the balance of justice, and to adjudicate upon them in the spirit of civilization and forbearance. There, palaces and public temples, whose beauty was itself an education, were ruthlessly burned to ashes. Here, with "no sound of axe or hammer," men were building a fairer edifice of international comity and law, in which nations should clasp hands in lasting fellowship. There, the descendants of the Latin race, as their fallen emperor termed them, flew at each other's throats with the ferocity of fiends. One who has ever been in Paris, in the streets now desolate with fire and red with blood, must mourn as he thinks of the smouldering ruins, the heaps of the slain, in places where he gazed upon such magnificence and beauty. Here, the descendants of the Anglo-Saxon race recognized the sublime appeal to reason and right, and met one another in the true dignity, and mutual respect, of civilized manhood. In the one place it would seem as if the demons gained a transient, but for a time, an absolute supremacy. In the other, though his name was not spoken, nor, perhaps, his influ-

ence even recognized,—in the public sentiment which his agency has created, educating, civilizing the advanced nations of Christendom, until they became prepared to recognize the majesty of truth and reason,—the Prince of Peace overruled the deliberations of men, and drew them into harmony.

Whence came this contrast? All days, rightly viewed, are judgment-days. The results of past action,—its fidelity, or sinfulness,—become inwrought into our life, to make us strong, or weak, to shape our present condition, and determine our destiny. The actual character, sooner or later, reveals its nature, and does its work. France has met another of her judgment-days. The world has admired, and gloried in her splendor. Travelers have journeyed over ocean and continent to study her works of art, to feast their eyes upon the magnificence of her now desecrated capital. Intelligent men in every land have listened to her physicians, mathematicians, her adepts in various forms of science, as holding a high place among the world's teachers. Her novelists, and men of letters, have fascinated myriads of readers. With her sunny lands, her apparently assured prosperity, her brilliant capital,—the queen of taste, and the home of art,—she seemed a year ago to

stand the first among the empires. But, though fertile in men of letters, ignorance was the characteristic of her people; and, demoralized by luxury corrupted by social indulgence,—by the love, and the vices of war,—“when the winds blew, and the floods came,” the edifice of greatness, built upon the sand, fell into ruins. Then the mask was torn away, and men showed themselves to be savages at heart. The fairest city became most like hell. No merely external civilization, with its grace of manners, its attainments in art, its splendors of architecture, or even its apparent progress in letters, can stand. It is the civilization of principle and character alone that is based upon a rock.

And shall we venture to name the other side of the contrast? France has been “weighed in the balance, and found wanting.” Shall we presume to say that England and America, in the test which these multiplied causes of national irritation have brought to their character, yet listening to reason instead of rushing to arms, have been weighed in the balance also, and *not* found wanting? The faults of England are clear enough to American eyes. We do not dwell upon them now,—the wrongs at home, abroad, on every continent which her flag has covered. The faults of Amer-

ica are also plain,—the growing corruption of her cities and her politics. Though her one appalling crime of slavery has been washed out in blood, perhaps atoned for by priceless sacrifices of priceless lives, blots enough remain to change all boasts into confessions. What patriot is not at times disheartened by the yet unsolved problems in respect to universal education, to national character itself, which will determine our future history? God knows how profoundly we need all true human efforts, and providential guidance, to accomplish our true mission for right and liberty. Still the splendid fact remains, that controversies embracing many causes of dispute, relating to acts that swept our commerce from the seas, and perilled the very existence of the republic in its hour of agony, when it seemed tottering to its fall, that these are to be settled by argument instead of arms. With all their faults, England and America are civilized enough to accomplish a triumph of peace that transcends all the victories of war.

It is a triumph of Christian civilization which we rejoice in to-day. Here is the reason why I regard it not only with joy, but with hope. Our text says, "Neither shall they learn war any more." Seven hundred years before the day of

Jesus, the prophet looked on, and on, into the future, to a time in which men should "beat their swords into ploughshares," "to pruning hooks their spears." Eighteen hundred years after the Prince of Peace has come, it seems to need an equally prophetic eye to look on, and on, to that distant day of joy. Sometimes we fear that this day of prophecy will never come. We almost question whether the prophet did not mistake some vision of heaven, of the harmony of angels, for the possible life of men. Not only are men still learning war, but they learn it now as they never learned it in all preceding centuries. In the collection of arms of different periods in the Tower of London, may be seen the wondrous progress of invention, from the rude weapons of a former day, to the perfected ones of the present hour. Science and thought have been tasked, century after century, to fashion more destructive missiles of death. Even the arts of industry have not made greater progress than those of war. Civilization makes the rifle more deadly, gives the cannon a more terrific range, and sends the shell for miles in its awful curve, as a demon of fire, crashing through private dwellings, or splendid cathedrals, on its errand of destruction and death.

The beneficent forces of nature are turned into engines of warfare, as if men would bring even the attributes of omnipotence to the work of slaughter. They shall learn war no more, do we say? Russia seems to be arming her millions and mustering for battle. Prussia has become a camp, and outstrips former masters in the art of war, in the far-reaching plans of her military leaders, and the earthquake shock of her armies, shattering an empire in a day. England, America, task themselves to construct the impregnable fortress, to build the ship which no shot can pierce, to fill their arsenals with the most perfect enginery of war. Princes and peoples are still striving to learn what the prophet predicted they should forget. Still, the prophet was not wrong. He did not merely speak of a long-distant future. His prophecy begins to be realized to-day. Blessed are our eyes to see the promise of a coming dawn. Somehow, by all its manifold and nameless influences, by the power of education, by the silent might of Christian feeling, swaying the minds of citizens and statesmen,—somehow, under God's overruling providence, a civilization has come which has prepared two nations for the peaceful settlement of disputes. The promise and glory of

this event is, that it seems an outgrowth of the nation's character. For this reason, we repeat, it is a basis of hope. A low degree of progress in the individual man, or in the nation, will never permit the peaceful appeal to reason. The brutalized, barbaric man must fight. Lift men up to a true civilization, educate them to recognize the sovereignty of thought and justice, and they outgrow barbaric appeals, and bow to the simple voice of truth as both diviner and mightier than the sword.

God be thanked that this triumph of peace comes to balance the discouragement amidst the savage outbreaks of international and civil war. Always God sets his bow in the cloud, and causes it to span the heavens after every deluge, to re-assure our hearts and hopes. We know not when nations will rise above the appeal to arms. Sometimes wars must come. When national existence and freedom itself are at stake, as in our own day of trial, lovers of their country and of liberty must meet the terrible necessity with the soul of heroes. Those who rush to such a strife, like our own citizen armies, are not mere soldiers. Those who fall in a cause so sacred are martyrs. You will help to decorate

their graves during this coming week, as a symbol of a nation's deathless gratitude. Such graves are shrines, and voices come from them to inspire us to recognize the supremacy of principle and right. No sepulchre of king or warrior, in the Old World, though in itself a triumph of art, is half so eloquent as the rows of graves in one of our national cemeteries,—graves of those perishing from wounds or starved in prisons, whose names even were unknown, but who were among the holy sacrifices for liberty. Such contests have come, when loyal men, lovers of liberty, must be faithful unto death. Perhaps they may come again. Still, more and more, civilized men will be prepared to submit to the control of reason, and nations will appeal to the tribunal of justice instead of the arbitrament of arms. I do not look for the triumphs of peace as the result of arguments in its behalf. It is easy to show the folly and waste, as well as the terrible devastations and bloodshed of war. The argument is unanswerable. But argument is powerless when men live in the domain of passion instead of reason. Brutalized, passionate men are as deaf to reason as the brutes themselves. In the true civilization that develops

manhood, the peaceful adjustments of national disputes will become as natural as the battle for barbaric races. It is a great thing to produce any special reform in the world's action. The whole ocean must be stirred in order to raise the tide at a single point. But then it will pour into every creek and inlet, and fill every channel open to its floods. To secure one splendid moral victory in the life of states, the truer civilization must come to uplift thought, sentiment, character. That civilization is coming. The omnipotent influences are at work to affect the action of governments and the character of nations. The leaven of Christian truth has been hid in the mass of human thought, to leaven the whole at last. Long centuries it has seemed to be buried from our sight. We have raised the old despairing cry, "Where is the promise of its coming?" The coral insect, in its countless generations, works on perhaps for centuries at the bottom of the sea. But by-and-by it fashions rocks that lift themselves above the waves, on which fair islands are formed, rich with vegetation green as that of Paradise. Now and then the coming Christian civilization reveals its power, hurling slavery from its ancient founda-

tions, settling controversies, securing peace between disagreeing nations. It shall accomplish the thing whereunto it is sent. Look through the prophet's eyes to the coming of that better day, and be glad.

What a magnificent service to a true civilization England and America can render! Linked together by a common parentage and a common tongue,—among the foremost in resources, culture, power,—spanning the globe with their settlements,—holding up the principles of peace in their intercourse with one another,—they may gradually shame or inspire Christendom to appeal to reason rather than to arms. There are men who seem inclined to stir up strife between these kindred nations. Politicians play upon the people's resentments to pave the way to personal aggrandizement. But while they thus place themselves with the enemies of true civilization, they cannot hinder its triumph. Twice already irritating controversies between England and America have had a peaceful settlement. This present treaty will be ratified on the other side of the ocean as cordially as here. These two kindred nations will not learn war with one another any more. Joined together by a cable

beneath the sea, they shall henceforth be joined in the closer bonds of amity. What is truest and best in either nation will be mutually transmitted to one another, till each shall receive the highest culture and progress of both, and gain a double inheritance of greatness. Hail to the event that makes such a consummation possible, with its promise to ourselves and to the world. Celebrate it at Christian altars, and gladly give one Sabbath to thanksgiving for such a victory of the Prince of Peace.

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